

Business Customer Experience (BCX): Conceptualization and Implications for Research

1 Introduction

Providing superior customer experience (CX) at the various touchpoints throughout the customer journey is seen as a major driver of supplier success (e.g., De Keyser et al., 2015; Frow & Payne, 2007; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Consequently, the phenomenon as well as the opportunities of positively influencing CXs through customer experience management (CXM) have been attracting increasing interest of business practitioners and marketing researchers (e.g., Homburg et al., 2017; Patrício et al., 2011; Witell et al., 2020). In practice, this is reflected in a multitude of CX initiatives and measures by firms in most industries around the world; while in research, this trend is mirrored in a wide range of studies dealing with the conceptualization of CX, its antecedents and outcomes as well as the means to shape CXs through CXM (e.g., Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Homburg et al., 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

However, the vast majority of these studies focus on CX and CXM in the consumer (B2C) sector (Homburg & Tischer, 2023), although their practical importance for business-to-business (B2B) settings is repeatedly emphasized (Bolton et al., 2006; Lemke et al., 2011, Witell et al. 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019; Zolkiewski et al., 2017). For instance, according to the recent trend study of the Institute for the Studies of Business Markets (ISBM), to “create innovative customer experiences” is ranked no. 2 among the top challenges for B2B marketers (Wuyts, 2021). However, considering that extreme outcomes across the customer journey can have significant positive and negative effects on renewing contracts in a B2B context (Bolton et al., 2006), it is even more critical that B2B organizations are obviously struggling in their CXM efforts (Homburg & Tischer 2023). For instance, intelligence from the field suggests that about 80% of B2B suppliers fail to deliver

unique customer experiences and lag behind B2C firms regarding the implementation and success of their CXM initiatives (Maechler et al., 2016, Wiersema, 2013). And a recent McKinsey report highlights that firms offering industrial services have difficulties to keep up with rising expectations regarding their customers' experiences (Lavandier et al., 2021).

These practical challenges of CXM in business markets are mirrored in research, as Ulaga (2018) states that “creating superior competitive advantage through customer experience management – especially in Business-to-Business Markets – still represents a vastly under-researched domain” (p. 81). We see the main reason for this development in the fact that, with few exceptions (e.g., Homburg & Tischer 2023, Witell et al., 2020), existing literature still falls short of thoroughly conceptualizing business CX (BCX), mainly for two reasons. First, studies that focus on the B2B sector typically investigate the suppliers' CMX activities (e.g., Homburg & Tischer 2023, Witell et al., 2020, Zolkiewski et al., 2017), hence neglecting the customer side to a large extent and thus also the specifics of BCX. Second, since customer experience literature has traditionally centered on the consumer context (e.g., Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), studies that focus on BCX often apply the tenets and assumptions of this literature without deeply considering the specific characteristics of organizational settings and their influence on BCX (e.g., Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2021).

Against this backdrop, *the goal of this paper is to conceptualize business customer experience (BCX)*. To achieve this goal, we perform a theory adaptation (Jaakkola, 2020). More specifically, we first challenge the current understanding of BCX and present four aspects that must be considered for the conceptualization of BCX: (1) the multidimensionality of BCX, (2) the multi-personality of the experiencing actor, (3) the existence of multiple customer journeys, and (4) the multiple reference subjects of customer experience in an organizational context. Next, we use phenomenology and sensemaking literature to provide a conceptualization of BCX that considers these different aspects.

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